

LEV MATVEJ LOEWENTHAL

EUDEMONIÀ

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EUEMONIA



Thecla Poetry

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A Greek myth tells us that a moment before becoming incarnate, our souls drink the water of the river of Forgiveness and we plunge into the material world without remembering what we have come to do on Earth: writing poems, sewing dresses, loving cats, promoting peace? Since birth, every man is accompanied in his earthly life by a minor deity, an agent or *genius*. If over time we manage to discover what we are meant for and to follow our call, we'll manage to make our own demon feel good. This is *Eudemonia*: to be blessed with a good demon, the *genius* who can help us do more than survive. *Eudemonia*, the good spirit, can help us thrive. Otherwise we will lead a useless life, lacking of internal harmony. We will be guided by insane appetites for Evil. This is *pleonexia*, that leaves us dissatisfied, deeply divided, full of self-hatred and, as a result, full of disgust for the harmony of creation.

Eudemonia

Look at the child in his cradle,
Human nature has endowed
him with a talent,¹
for the rest of his life
he will have to realise
the good he possesses,
the gift, this tiny,
light, precious coin
with which to pay nothing
but his own sovereignty.

¹ As in the *Bible*, in the sense of *coin* [line 8]

The Whispering Demon

He whispers to my ear :
“You haven’t told them about me,
But they see me dancing in your mind,
Bathing in your eyes,
Coming out of the wound
Of your mouth
Wet with your thoughts”

He whispers in my hair :
“You haven’t told them about me,
But they recognise me
In the Judaism of your soul,
In your cultural Christianity,
In the Sufism of your poetry”

Despite their screams,
Against my degenerated art
I hear still
A moaning in my head

It is the rustle of a phoenix wing
Rising from the ashes
Of the Granada's library

Soaring up over the vestiges
Of a million Arabic manuscripts

Soaring up over the hopes
Of six millions lives lost

Thus, if they never learned
A language other than
The sound of weapons :

“Take your sword of words,
The dagger of your inherited hope
The cutlass of forgetting
And be the Pen,

Writing till the end!”²

My prayers are poems
Under a mantle of notes.

² Allusion to the *Quran*, 68.1. Nūn : *He first created the Pen of the writer, and He said to the Pen, 'Walk and write,' and the Pen answered 'What shall I write?' and He said, 'Write concerning what happens till the end'.*

Seeking for מְשֻׁלָּח

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God

Engraving Words on paper cenotaphs
my iron pen demands
which God to take
which Word to profess

It seeks a Word
that hides in its flesh
a multitude of sins,
a grain of music
a note of incantation

It seeks a Lord
who sounds,
on each Aeolic harp,

strong at the start
and breathed at the end

A Word of the past,
when the world was new and fresh

A Lord
whose name contains
the whole alphabet
beginning with aleph
and ending with all letters
the last ³

³ The poem is played around the Hebrew word for Truth אמת. Line 5: there is an allusion to the book *With an Iron Pen: Twenty Years of Hebrew Protest Poetry*. The poem has been dedicated by the Author to Kobi Farhi, lead singer and founder 'Orphaned Land', whose lyrics promote a message of peace and unity, particularly between the three main Abrahamic religions.

The Shape of Peace

Do you hear the sound approaching?
It's the rustle of something new
It's an Arab & Jewish voice
Speaking cheerfully in unison
Shouting loudly "I was born
I can lastly take on any form:
I can be a wandering sapling
In whose bark are incised
Wily epigrams and proverbs
In whose lymph
The Scrolls of Abraham
And the Five Books of Moses
flow,
Erotic verses blooth
With the humorous old wisdom
Of my tumultuous youth".

A female Messiah

I am young and savage,
upon the bosom I erect superb
a turgid breast ready to pillage,
loot and ravage

The limbs of the world
One day I will rub
with perfumed oils,
myrrh and balms
But still I feel
my nipples burn⁴

Pomegranates and olive trees
bloom in my palms

⁴ The line refers to a traditional Afghan saying among the mothers of soldiers killed on the battlefield.

Sins of compassion
are carved on my lips
as litanies of psalms

And still I feel
my nipples burn

I'm a creature of amber sand
Shaped in the foam of the Jaffa sea
Chained to orange mosaic tiles

Many are ready to sacrifice
themselves on my altarpiece
with heavy hearts,
and eyes of grief

Many are ready to serve me
But I'm a luxury

that most men don't deserve⁵

⁵ The poem is built around a word revealed by the rhymes -iece | -ief; and this is *Peace*.

Intimation to my Enemy

Undress yourself
Take off your armour
And through your open wound
With your living flesh
Dress me up in your body,
Brother.

Düşmanıma...

Soyun
Çıkar zırhını, kuşandığın silahları
Al tenindeki açık yarandan içeri
Benimle giydir kendini⁶

⁶ The author of this beautiful translation into Turkish is Betül Parlak.

Prayer in the Desert
to a Black Thistle

Our non-departure
took place punctually
Our non-arrival
in the Promised Land
occurred on time

We are still slaves
of hate, devastation
and crimes.

Our non-arrival
in the Holy Land
dates back centuries

We're still wandering
through the arid sands
of our enslaved hearts.

Black Thistle's Response

I'm only a thorn less flower
without any strength or power
I am not the damask rose
that so many poets sins enclose
Nobody sings my petals whistle
I'm a humble desert thistle

I've sprouted and grown
near the sacrificial stone
chosen by Abraham
for his first-born son

From the darkness womb
Both brothers were born
Purest faith their descendants
unhappily forsworn

The Child of Sin

My mum is Jewish,
My dad is Muslim,
I'm the daughter of Sin.

Or simply am I a bish?

One thing to know I wish
and nothing else :
How can I be enemy to myself?

*Even as one who dreams that he is harmed
and, dreaming, wishes he were dreaming, thus
desiring that which is, as if it were not,
so I became within my speechlessness*
[Dante, *Inferno*, 30.136]

My Demon's Dream

A ruby red reflection
flickers, bites, burns
so much fire in my reality
and so much turquoise
blue, amethyst purple
and adamant green
in his world!

He lives between
two equally intolerable dreams :
his and mine.

He lives neither on Earth

nor in heaven, but occupies
an intermediate space,
above the rooftops
and below the sky.

In this neutral zone,
he defies
Earth's attraction but isn't
swallowed up
by the heaven's
absence of gravity

If this intermediary space,
where conflicting dreams
interweave, failed to exist,
if he awoke before me,
the two worlds would collapse.

The trembling of the sky
would merge with that of Earth.

Songs and tales,
before falling asleep,
in an ancient language.
Ha tikva, Hinei ma tov,
Yerushalaim shel zahav

A series of chants for four,
five, six and eight voices.

Accompanied by a harpsichord.

*For when dreams increase and words grow
many, there is vanity; but God is the one you
must fear.*

Ecclesiastes 5:7

The roots of my soul

The house I can no longer enter
has hand-painted drawings on its walls
and a corridor
infused with the scent of my childhood

From its open windows I could get
spring-wind gusts and swallows songs

A woman's voice behind
the closed door
was ready to welcome me
with a caress

Suddenly life closed against
the dense whiteness,
locking in the wistfulness
of an inexorable distance
in time

Swift glares of light
eradicate the roots
of the universe.

Only one lit candle
illuminates the world.

Wherever I go,
that house will be inside me
although I won't be inside it
anymore.

To my young branches

If you are wondering
where you are
every time I write a line,
know that you are
in my every breath,
in every single letter
of my alphabet.

You are my work of art
And I am the wooden panel,
not the frame limiting you.

And even when I am gone,
I will always be that table
on which you both are engraved.

When we forget

When we forget that
our souls have their own
ancestors and
feel the rope against our bark

Then we forget
the flavour of malt
and honey biscuits,
the charm of the blue donkey,
dancing in the sky

tuning with his *viola d'amore*
the soul of every creature
with the harmony of Chaos.

Fast scribe stylus

My torn tongue is
a fast scribe stylus
and sings

Only when everything
Will be in harmony
An eurhythmy of the soul
In accordance with the universe

And the blue clock on the old
Jewish Town Hall in Prague,
(whose hands move
counterclockwise),
will become the refuge
of the emerald green donkey

I will slit my tongue faster
than any butcher

The Grace Note

When the world was fresh and new,
just came out of the breath
of the Creator,

Our Lord shaped
something special
to beautify it,
a tiny, simple grace note.

an ornament to adorn
and embellish this world,
His melody.

He only wrote it smaller
on His pentagram and
left us free
to interpret it

I guess, this tiny, simple note
is Love

A note of short duration
among the sounding
of the longer-lasting noises
surrounding

Shalim, the lost God of Peace

His legacy lives on
through his name,
Shalim
He lives in the greetings
of Arabs and Jews
who have forgotten the truth
that they are children
of the same father

נשיקה לי תן

This life the timing wasn't right

My body clinging to your mind,
melted, dissolved, back to the origin
of beings, once twinned.

Movements alive in the past
wrap themselves around
cut threads,
and all our days are cast

Lost sighs and a never given kiss
that slips
out of the mouth
towards the abyss
of resins and buds

A kiss given in a last life, maybe

before we sever;
a farewell, forever

And if next life won't grace me
with your kiss, I will still
wait till
another life comes

My end will be my beginning
And if the notes have many colors,
the most vivid will be my silence

נשיקה לי תן

We'll love each other, whatever dress
our bodies wear.

And if you're a woman and
I'm a woman, then
I'm the mother who'll rock you.

And if you're a man and
I'm a man, I'm the brother
who'll support you.

whatever dress my body may have,
I will continue to love and
await you and be with you
the last
shy

sinner

De ta présente absence

*Je t'aime de deux amours,
L'un de passion, l'autre de respect.
Dans l'amour de passion, je te cherche
chaque nuit
Et comme l'époux du Chant,
En ne te trouvant pas,
Chaque nuit je meurs d'un jour,
Seul, dans mon lit.
Dans l'amour de respect, chaque jour je
renais,
Sephora, de ton absence :
Infirmes maladie qui guérit.
Notre vie est un nombre limité de
souffles,
Chaque souffle en abrège la durée,
Et nous vivons de ce qui nous tue.*

Della tua presente assenza

Ti amo di due amori,
uno di passione, l'altro di rispetto.
Nell'amore di passione, ti cerco ogni
notte
e, come lo sposo del *Cantico*,
non trovandoti,
ogni notte muoio d'un giorno,
solo, nel mio letto.
Nell'amore di rispetto, ogni giorno
rinasco,
Sephora, della tua assenza:
inferma malattia che cura.
La nostra vita è un numero contato di
respiri,
ogni fiato ne abbrevia la durata,
e viviamo di ciò che ci uccide.

Le métier du vivant

Stranger in my own mirror
A mimicking cloud
A cluster of hopeless creatures
Forger of overturned words
My homeland is my language
A torn tongue
In the cavity of bloodless time

*Étranger dans mon propre miroir
Un nuage mimant
Une nuée de créatures sans espoir
Le métier du vivant
Faussaire de mots chavirés
Ma patrie est ma langue
Une langue déchirée
À la béance du temps exsangue*

Straniero nel mio proprio specchio
Una nuvola che mima
Un nugolo di creature senza illusioni
Le métier du vivant
Falsario di parole rovesciate
La mia patria è la mia lingua
Una lingua straziata
Nell'intercapedine del tempo esangue

Le siège de l'âme

*Le serment d'un tricheur témoigne :
En Israël il y a une ville, Luz est-elle
appelée
C'est l'endroit où Jacob fit un songe
L'Ange de la Mort ne pouvait y pénétrer
Elle devint ainsi le sanctuaire
d'immortalité.
Dans mon jardin, il pousse un amandier
au pied duquel un souterrain mène à la
ville cachée.
Luz en hébreu est aussi une particule
corporelle
de la grandeur d'une amande,
représentée
comme un os très dur, indestructible, à
laquelle
l'âme demeurerait liée pour l'éternité.
Au luz de ton âme, Sephora,*

*j'ai consacré tout un roman
pour que tu ne craignes pas la mort
qui ne s'attaque qu'aux vivants.*

La sede dell'anima

Il giuramento di un baro afferma:

In Israele c'è una città, Luz è chiamata

È il luogo dove Giacobbe fece un sogno

L'angelo della Morte non poteva

penetrarvi

Diventò così il santuario

dell'immortalità.

Nel mio giardino cresce un mandorlo

ai piedi del quale un sotterraneo

conduce alla città nascosta.

Luz in ebraico è anche una particella del

corpo

Grande come una mandorla,

rappresentata

come un osso molto duro, alla quale

l'anima rimarrebbe legata per l'eternità.

Al luz della tua anima, Sephora,

ho dedicato un intero romanzo

affinché tu non tema la morte
che si attacca solamente ai vivi.

Cito in giudizio D-o

Sulla terra piovono a gocce schegge e
micce.

Non vedi salire fino al tuo cielo
la pastosa nube che si sfiocca,
riversando giù
cenere e caligine?

Sei veramente così vecchio,
inebetito e cieco?
Non ne hai abbastanza
di questa perpetua nebbia,
del perpetuo olocausto?

O è questa la nuova alleanza,
il tuo angelo ha già annunciato:
*“Venite, radunatevi
per il gran banchetto di D-o?
Il regno dei cieli*

*deve essere edificato
sulle carni di t u t t i gli uomini !”*

Decorsi i termini,
la tua ultima ghiotta cena
a base di ossuti corpi
del popolo ebraico
è passata in giudicato.

Ora vuoi cibarti a Niamey,
a Roma, Nizza, a Tirana,
Parigi, Riga, a Zara,
Berlino, Stoccolma, Cúcuta,
di sconcertati studenti europei,
di scarni sorrisi nigeriani,
di vividi sguardi siriani
e di violate bambine colombiane.

Ho letto frasi d'amore
sui muri di Aleppo:

*«Amami ...
lontano dalla nostra città
sazia di morte».*

Cito in giudizio il vecchio,
inebetito e cieco D-o
e il suo ubiquo insaziabile appetito.

L'ultima concessami

L'attimo corre veloce,
già sta modificando
ogni cosa sotto il mio sguardo.
Un fluido sonno ora scorre,
sul tuo letto di parole.
Il vento del tempo,
con falce ricurva,
spazza via il giorno.
Tutti i miei pensieri,
la mia memoria,
il mio volere,
immersi nella cenere
di un mondo arso
tra le viscere,
che non sarà più vivo,
quando nessuno più lo ricorderà.
Non ho fretta.
Non ho ancora voglia di svegliarmi.

Perché, sveglio,
mi mancherà la forza
di impugnare il mio volere.
E camminerò, come in sogno,
fantasma di un ricordo
deformato dalla memoria.

Falsario di parole

Filo e tessitura
trama
filo di sutura
ordito lacerato
lavoro di rammendo
Recido
il filo della vita
L'chaim!
Creo
pupazzi di carta

La domanda a Ṭarābulus al-Gharb

Non sei più il mio passepartout,
bramato passaporto rossocrociato.
Fiero ti esibisco e vengo fermato,
confinato in un gabinetto,
all'aeroporto di una fenicia
città nord-africana.
L'acqua goccia dal rubinetto,
il piscio ristagna sul pavimento.
Non mi proteggono più i miei talismani,
timbri, libri e vaccini,
le vestigia della triplice città,
l'amico col baule di antiche risa
e l'aranceto nel cortile di casa,
la parola *missione*,
la mia vaga erudizione,
Rudel e la contessa amata da lontano?
Da ore sto,
come giunco nello stagno,

in piedi,
senza un D-o da bestemmiare,
di fronte a loro che, quanto me,
dovrebbero amare
il tanfo amaro dell'acre
stuoia del nomadismo.
Esigono la Verità.
Penso: *quante verità e tutte belle!*
La verità della verginità e quella della
passione,
la verità dell'impegno e quella
dell'indifferenza,
la verità della dissolutezza e quella della
moralità,
la verità della morigeratezza e quella
dello sperpero.
Quale volete?
Mancano irrimediabilmente di ironia,
i gendarmi addestrati alla sevizia
a Zliten e alzano la voce in una lingua

mai parca di versetti o ammonimenti.
In questo sinodo affollato,
i randelli mi finiscono sui denti!
Soddisfatti, ammiccano.
L'hanno infine scovata,
minuscola e pudica,
tremante e bella coperta solo
di quei pochi veli
che il tempo le ha concesso.
La Verità appena nata,
che mi ha raggiunto qui
in un cesso-cella
da così lontano che,
quando è arrivata,
sfinita e raggelata,
non ha avuto quasi più nulla
da confidarmi.
E quel che ha detto,
l'ha sussurrato adagio:

siamo tutti stranieri
e di passaggio.

Lev Matvej Loewenthal is the *nom de plume* of a Swiss by passport polyglot novelist, essayist and poet born in Rome and grown up in Zurich, who usually writes political and satirical fiction under English, French and Italian names.

Rethinking identities in contemporary world, the Author declares him/herself a Swiss-transnational writer. Being employed at a Swiss public cultural institution and publishing books under his/her real name, the Writer has chosen a pseudonym to keep his/her two activities separate.

The Writing Demon haunts him/her from an early age : (s)he has been publishing stories that have a historical background and instances of the fantastic : a combination that has become his/her signature, the hallmark of Lev's work and the formula for his/her own magical realism.

In his/her deeply philosophical, provocative and compelling works, the Author often deals with the interplay of Good and Evil, innocence and guilt, and reinterprets the *vulgata* of the three main Abrahamic religions in the light of current political events.

In 2017, with the publication in Italy of the novel *La Dodicesima Nota* (finalist in the Carver literary prize), of an anthology of poems in French called *Sefer Sephora*, followed by *The Falsifier of Words* (a satirical and eccentric collection of short stories, written in an English idiosyncratic language, consisting in multilingual puns and portmanteau words), the Author forged "Lev Matvej Loewenthal" (whose name is played on that of the Bulgakovian evangelist), for whom (s)he conceived a highly distinctive technique and poetic idiom.

In June 2018 a new book has come out, *L'Altro Stato*, Castevecchi editore, Rome.

His/her fictional works have been translated into Dutch, Japanese and Turkish (*La Dodicesima Nota*, translated from Betül Parlak, published by Aleph Yayinevi, Istanbul, won a prestigious Looren Translation Grant 2018). In June 2018 the Author collaborated with the Israeli photographer Dana Arieli, writing a short oneiric story to one of her photos as part of her project, entitled *Phantoms: Journeys following the relics of Dictatorships*.

